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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: THE U.S. AND TAIWAN'S UN REFERENDUM

¶1. Summary: As U.S. Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs Thomas Christensen's speech on Taiwan's UN referendum Monday remained in the spotlight of the Taiwan media, news coverage on September 13 also focused on President Chen Shui-bian's interview with the "Wall Street Journal" Wednesday and his video conference with the European Union Parliament Thursday; on the Pentagon's announcement to sell anti-submarine aircraft and missiles to Taiwan; and on next year's legislators' and presidential elections. The pro-unification "United Daily News" front-paged a banner headline that read "Taiwan-U.S. High-level Dialogue Has Been Called off." The centrist, KMT-leaning "China Times" also ran a banner headline on page four that said "[Christensen's] Harsh Criticism against [Taiwan's UN Bid] Is Approved by the White House and [U.S. Vice President Dick] Cheney." The pro-independence "Liberty Times," Taiwan's biggest circulation daily, however, ran a banner headline on page two that said "Bian: Nothing Will Come out of the Referendum."

¶2. In terms of editorials and commentaries, a "Liberty Times" editorial said the U.S. government's public criticism against Taiwan's UN referendum lately has, to a certain extent, sparked anti-U.S. sentiment in Taiwan. The article also called on the United States to spend time listening to the voices of the Taiwanese people. DPP Chairman Yu Shyi-kun also said in a "Liberty Times" op-ed that Washington has twisted the meaning of Taiwan's UN referendum and failed to understand the Taiwan people's feelings. Columnist Antonio Chiang said in the mass-circulation "Apple Daily" that Christensen's straightforward comment on Taiwan's political situation has obviously exceeded his capacity as a foreign service officer, but very few people in Taiwan criticized him for having intervened in Taiwan's internal affairs. A "China Times" editorial, on the other hand, called on Taiwan to stop dancing to the tune set by politicians and be the masters of their own destiny. End summary.

A) "Why Doesn't the United States Listen More to the Voices from the Taiwan People's Hearts?"

The pro-independence "Liberty Times" [circulation: 720,000] editorialized (9/14):

"The Pentagon announced September 13 a decision to sell Taiwan weapons totaling US\$2.2 billion. But at the Taiwan-U.S. Defense Industry Conference just a few days ago, U.S. Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs Thomas

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Christensen criticized harshly our country's UN referendum. ... Judging from the fact that [Washington] sells weapons to Taiwan but does not support Taiwan's UN bid, it is not difficult to determine that the U.S. government's cross-Strait policy is aimed at maintaining a balanced situation, in an attempt to prevent China from invading and annexing Taiwan and to maintain U.S. interests. But such a slanted policy that only emphasizes the unilateral

interests of the United States is inexplicable for the Taiwanese people. Moreover, the U.S. government's public criticism against the UN referendum recently has, to a certain extent, sparked anti-U.S. sentiment in Taiwan. ...

"For Taiwan's part, its efforts to strengthen its defense capabilities are surely designated to resist China's invasion against Taiwan. But why does Taiwan need to safeguard itself against China's invasion? We want to tell our American friends right now that the answer is to maintain the independent status of Taiwan's sovereignty. Taiwanese people identify with Taiwan as their country, so they will not tolerate any schemes by China to unify Taiwan, including the use of force. ...

"Honestly speaking, we are very worried that the U.S. government's two-pronged approach will create an unfavorable impression in the hearts of the Taiwanese people. Over the past few years, those who boycotted the U.S. arms procurements were mainly those who advocated ultimate unification with China. But if the U.S. government repeatedly announces that Taiwan is not a country and that it does not support Taiwan's UN bid, many Taiwanese people may likely begin to question whether the United States also seeks to suppress Taiwan's sovereign status like China has been doing. Should this be the case, why does Taiwan need to spend money buying weapons? ... In the face of what the U.S. government has been doing lately, some Taiwanese people might also begin to question whether Washington is applying a double standard on democracy, or they might even question the essence of democratic values. Should such doubts increase, it will obviously be unfavorable for the United States' strategy to promote democracy all over the world.

"The U.S. government expects Taiwan to be strong and moderate; isn't this also the expectation of the Taiwanese people? ... To make the island strong and moderate in the face of Taiwan's increasingly perilous environment, the Taiwanese people need to promote more proactively the island's status as an independent sovereignty. The close and friendly relationship between Taiwan and the United States relies on mutual understanding. The U.S. government has more than once stated its cross-Strait policy to the Taiwan people. Shouldn't it also listen more to the voices from the hearts of the Taiwanese?"

B) "To Safeguard Referenda and Democracy to the End"

DPP Chairman Yu Shyi-kun opined in the pro-independence "Liberty Times" [circulation: 720,000] (9/14):

"U.S. Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs Thomas Christensen expressed opposition to Taiwan's UN referendum on the grounds that it will alter the status quo. But in reality, Christensen's remarks reflected exactly that Washington has twisted [the meaning] of Taiwan's referendum; that it does not understand the feelings of the Taiwanese people; and that it is attempting to shirk its responsibility for its failed cross-Strait policy. ... Washington announced that it wants to maintain the status quo across the Taiwan Strait as it defines it. But what Taiwan has seen is the United States tacitly agreeing that China can expand its definition of Taiwan independence and draw a red line on Taiwan's democratic development. I cannot help but wonder where the accusation of the island changing its national name comes from if Taiwan is not a country? ..."

C) "Americans' Lecture"

Columnist Antonio Chiang noted in his column in the mass-circulation "Apple Daily" [circulation: 530,000] (9/14):

"The rank of U.S. Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs Thomas Christensen is equivalent to that of the director of the Department of East Asian and Pacific Affairs of Taiwan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Christensen's straightforward comment on Taiwan's political situation has obviously exceeded his capacity as a foreign service officer. But few people in Taiwan have criticized him for having intervened with [Taiwan's] internal affairs, and instead, people generally believe that his remarks were pertinent. The Taiwan society indeed can hardly be regarded as anti-U.S. ..."

"Americans have run out of patience for A-Bian, so now the Taiwan issue has to be dealt with directly by the White House. In fact, the Americans are aware that the UN referendum is not a big deal; they just have doubts about the island's UN bid using the name 'Taiwan.' ... A-Bian has emphasized repeatedly that he will not change the island's national name and nothing will come out of the referendum. But given his previous record, not even the four heavyweights in the DPP can guarantee that. ..."

E) "It Would Be Better to Expect [Taiwan's] Voters to Wake up Than to Expect the Two Parties to Stop [the Progress of] Referenda"

The centrist, KMT-leaning "China Times" [circulation: 400,000] editorialized (9/14):

"... But the two major political parties' reckless moves to launch referenda on joining or re-joining the UN have obviously damaged the mutual trust between Taiwan and the United States and escalated the confrontation between the two sides of the Taiwan Strait. An even more serious side effect is that, should the two referenda fail to be passed, people might interpret it to mean the Taiwanese people are not enthusiastic about this issue, which will thus harm the morale of the Taiwanese and the impression of the international community of Taiwan. ... Thus, this paper does not believe that it is a wise move that serves our national and the people's interests to continue pushing for the referenda to join or re-join the UN now. ... But judging from the reality, ... the best way will be for the Taiwan public to truly realize what is going on now and decide not to dance to the tune set by the politicians any more, and be the masters of their own destiny. ..."

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